

Americans in Vilnius Taste Their Parents' Past

By ANN COOPER

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VILNIUS, Lithuania, March 22 — When the lights flickered out in President Vytautas Landsbergis's office one evening this week, Carla Gruodis feared Moscow was at work again, turning up the psychological pressure on the Lithuanian President and his rebellious Government.

The outage turned out to be temporary. But for Ms. Gruodis, a Canadian of Lithuanian heritage, it was a chilling reminder that 50 years of Soviet rule have given Moscow control of everything from the borders to the flow of electricity into her parents' homeland.

"We thought, 'We don't even have candles, when we really should have a generator in this building,'" said Ms. Gruodis, who spends long hours these days as a volunteer in the new Government's information bureau here.

Ms. Gruodis is part of a contingent of North Americans, mostly the offspring of Lithuanian émigrés, who have arrived in Vilnius in recent months to share in the euphoria — and now, anxiety — of the drive for independence.

An Economist, a Lawyer

They include a Harvard economist who is coaching the Lithuanian Prime Minister on the leap to a market economy, a New York lawyer who is advising President Landsbergis on constitutional questions, and a businessman, also from New York, exploring possible investments for Lithuania's prosperous diaspora.

This week, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet President, imposed restrictions on travel by foreigners to Lithuania and ordered Soviet prosecutors to police the activities of foreigners already in the republic.

The orders appeared to be aimed at the North Americans, who, despite the proclamation of independence, still need Soviet-issued visas to travel to Lithuania.

Impact of Travel Order

The Harvard economics professor, Lawrence Summers, said he was detained in Moscow for about an hour this week before officials allowed him to continue his journey to the Lithuanian capital, where he is advising Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene on open markets. Others reported no immediate repercussions from President Gorbachev's orders.

"I'm not concerned because I'm doing nothing illegal," said Joseph Kazickas, who fled Lithuania in 1944 and is now president of Neris International, a New York energy company.

Mr. Kazickas, who is in Vilnius scouting for business possibilities, said he was confident that Lithuania would emerge from its showdown with the Kremlin independent and prepared to chart a course toward capitalism.

But the uncertainties of Lithuania's political fate have stalled Prime Minister's Prunskiene's drive to solicit foreign investment, which Lithuania badly needs if it is to end its dependence on the Soviet economy.

A recent appeal for 1,000 economists, lawyers and other specialists to volunteer their skills in building a new society has been largely unheeded by Lithuanian émigrés. Of some three million émigrés and their descendants living outside Lithuania, only a handful have returned so far to witness the battle to restore the independence that ended with Soviet annexation in 1940.

Edward R. Tuskenis, a 25-year-old Lithuanian-American from Chicago who works in the Parliament's information office, said he expected to stay in Lithuania, perhaps permanently. But he will not be joined by his parents nor by most other émigrés of their generation, now comfortably settled in the West after leaving their war-torn homeland in the 1940s.

"The Lithuania they left really doesn't exist any more," Mr. Tuskenis said.

The Lithuanian émigrés who settled in Chicago, Cleveland, Toronto and other cities were determined to keep their language and culture alive along with the dream of independence.

They passed on their heritage to Mr. Tuskenis's generation by building close-knit communities with cultural centers, Lithuanian scouting groups and Saturday classes in Lithuanian for schoolchildren.

"People in the West do care, sure," Ms. Gruodis said. "There's been a big media campaign. They've seen the children here, holding candles and singing. But in the end, it's three and a half million people in a far corner of Europe."